



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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Wisconsin receives Luminaria Award

Award recognizes efforts to address disproportionality in special education

MADISON—Wisconsin recently received an award for its efforts over the past year to address disproportionality: the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education.

The national Luminaria Award, presented to Wisconsin during the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) forum addressing disproportionality, recognized the state's comprehensive planning and leadership activities in special education.

"This award recognizes our efforts to improve the quality of education statewide so all students—including students with disabilities, students of color, and students living in poverty—have equal opportunity to a quality education," said State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster.

Disproportionality, which affects the learning of all students, is the term used to describe the over- or under-representation of some student groups in special education referrals, identifications, and placements because of educational, cultural, racial, or ethnic differences rather than true special educational needs. The NCCRESt works with educators to create culturally responsive educational systems to reduce the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education.

For the past four years, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has worked to address statewide concerns regarding disproportionality in special education. The agency workgroup has developed a method and criteria for determining if there is significant disproportionality at the state and local levels. The workgroup also is developing a focused monitoring process and technical assistance options to support local school districts in improving outcomes for students. The Continuous

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Improvement and Focused Monitoring System is intended to achieve positive results for children with disabilities, while ensuring compliance with state and federal laws and regulations.

The DPI conducted an institute addressing disproportionality last summer. The agency also has provided grants from state Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) discretionary funds to help school districts and the state's cooperative educational service agencies target disproportionality. The grants are providing funds to examine data, seek and provide training, and develop resources on disproportionality issues.

"Wisconsin is one of the few states that is directing IDEA discretionary funding to the important and difficult issue of disproportionality," Burmaster said. "I am proud of our efforts. Our state's disproportionality action plan is in direct alignment with our New Wisconsin Promise to ensure a quality education for every child."

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